

Zachary Boyd as Minister of the Barony Parish: a Commentator on the late Reformation Church

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Among figures of the late Scottish Reformation, Zachary Boyd is remembered as a poet of little accomplishment, and as a figure of limited historical significance. This is a misleading picture of a man who has too often been relegated to being a historical and literary curiosity. While Boyd did not play any single major rôle in the Scottish church, it is not that he lacked importance, for, as the minister of Barony parish in Glasgow for over thirty-five years, his immense corpus of writings remain as a revealing barometer of the religious climate of his times. One hardly need argue that the life of the church is in large measure sustained by the beliefs and attitudes of those who sit in the pews. It is in this regard that Boyd's sermons are important, for they tell us much about the religious needs of these ordinary souls. Boyd was not, moreover, simply a parish minister, and, as one schooled in theology and closely involved with the enterprises of Glasgow University, his works also reflect the larger political, social, and theological issues of the Scottish church.

Maurice Lindsay aptly describes the seventeenth century in Scotland as "not an age upon which the Scots can reasonably look back on with much pride".¹ Not only was the church characterised by divisiveness and intolerance, but Scotland was suffering from a cultural poverty caused by the departure of the court to London, and by the church's ambivalence, if not outright hostility, to humane studies. While the seventeenth century in Scotland was a period of extraordinary political and ecclesiastical change, it was this very change which produced the religious extremism and narrowness of vision which historians often see as the dominant feature of the age. In this context, Boyd stands out as one who remained above religious controversy and partisan politics, even while he provides insight into the seventeenth-century Scottish church. Rare is it that Boyd strays into polemical discourse, as he concerns himself with impressing on his parishioners the importance of the Christian message and with carrying that message to them in a language they understand.

¹ M. Lindsay, *History of Scottish Literature* (London, 1977), 128.

The details of Boyd's life are reasonably complete.² Born in Kilmarnock, Ayrshire in 1585, Boyd was a cousin of Andrew Boyd, bishop of Argyll, and Robert Boyd of Trochrigg. He completed his early education in Kilmarnock, and then went on, first to the College of Glasgow, where he matriculated in 1601, and then to St Andrews, where he completed the Master of Arts in 1607. Boyd subsequently left Scotland for Saumur, where he completed his education, and was to remain for sixteen years, returning to Scotland in 1623. Boyd was appointed professor at Saumur in 1611, and was offered the position of principal in 1615, which he declined. When he returned to Scotland, Boyd did not immediately find a parish, and lived for a time in the households of Sir William Scott of Elie and the Marquis of Hamilton. In 1625, however, he was called to the Barony parish, which at one time covered approximately fifteen square miles and had about 1,200 communicants. He remained in this parish for the remainder of his life. Little is known of Boyd's marriages, the first being to Elizabeth Fleming of Glasgow, who died in 1636, and the second to Margaret Mure whom he predeceased. Boyd died in 1653.

Boyd's interests were not solely confined to his Barony parish, and important here is his long association with Glasgow University. Boyd was elected Dean of Faculty in 1631, and was re-elected in 1633 and 1635; he was also elected Rector in 1634, 1635 and 1645, and Vice Chancellor in 1644. He held the Vice Chancellor's position until his death in 1653. Boyd's interest in Glasgow University went well beyond his professional affiliations, and much is made of his various large donations to the university. The most significant of these gifts was his £20,000 bequest to Glasgow University. Ironically, it is the circumstances of this gift that allowed Boyd to go unnoticed as a major contributor to the English prose tradition in Scotland. A condition of the bequest was that part of the funds be used to publish one thousand copies of a selection of Boyd's prose works, and, while the university initially intended to honour the condition, the fact is that Boyd's works were never published. It is inappropriate to accuse the university, much after the fact, of acting in bad faith, and several explanations have been offered as to why the university failed in its obligation. There were at least some final accommodations that had to be made with Boyd's second wife, who remarried soon after his death, and it is also the case that the Earl of Loudoun owed Boyd 6,000 merks, which the university was likely waiting to recover before moving ahead with

² Boyd's nineteenth-century editor, Gabriel Neil, provides a number of reasonably complete biographies of Boyd, which are appended to his editions of *The Last Battell of the Soule in Death* (1838), and *Zions Flowers: or, Christian Poems for Spiritual Edification* (1855).

the publishing project. The earl had, however, fallen on hard times, and the 6,000 merks were never recovered. Whatever the reason, Boyd's sermons have until recent times never been published,³ and one may be forgiven for wondering if the university believed itself absolved of responsibility when it ordered a marble bust of Boyd to commemorate his generous gift. The Boyd bust remains in the Glasgow University museum.

Boyd was a prolific writer, both in poetry and prose, which is unfortunate, given that it is his poetry that has so tarnished his reputation. Boyd published three separate collections of verse during his life. While appearing in 1644, *The Garden of Zion* dates from Boyd's earlier period in Saumur. It is an exceedingly dull work, containing, in Boyd's words, "the life and death of godly and wicked men in Scripture . . . from Adam unto the last of the Kings of Judah and Israel".⁴ It is also transparently didactic, as Boyd culls "good uses" from the biblical histories he reworks. Written along the same lines are *The Psalms of David In Meeter* (1644) and *Scriptural Songs or, Holy Poems* (1645), which are also poetical paraphrases of scripture.

Boyd's efforts at putting the Psalms in metre are significant because they point to Boyd's hope that the General Assembly would choose his rendering to replace the version in use since 1564; that he failed certainly did not help his reputation as a writer. While Boyd had some supporters in the Assembly, they were never sufficient to carry the day. Boyd's good friend, Baillie, clearly understood this when he wrote, "Our good friend, Mr. Zacharie Boyd, has put himself to a great deal of pains and charges to make a Psalter, but I ever warned him his hopes were groundless to get it received in our churches, yet the flatteries of his unadvised neighbours make him insist in his fruitless design".⁵ As we know, the Commissioners finally settled on what is usually called Rous' version, which, ironically enough, was amended by a committee of the General Assembly which included Boyd.

Given the quality of these three works, one can hardly fault those who made fun of Boyd, although Boyd did have his defenders. Bailie Nicol Jarvie, for example, suggested to Frank Obaldstone that he "might read a spell o' the worthy Mr. Zachary Boyd's translation of the Scriptures . . . better poetry nane to be".⁶ But Samuel Colvil obviously did not share these sentiments

³ Apart from Neil's editions of Boyd, the only collection of Boyd's works is *Selected Sermons of Zachary Boyd*, ed. D. W. Atkinson (Aberdeen, 1989).

⁴ Boyd, *The Garden of Zion* (Glasgow, 1644), sig. A^r.

⁵ Quoted in *A Biographical Dictionary of Eminent Scotsmen* (Glasgow, 1875), i, 174.

⁶ R. Wodrow, *Collections Upon the Lives of the Reformers and Most Eminent Ministers of the Church of Scotland* (Glasgow, 1845), 352.

when he observed that “bad lines many times causeth more mirth than good ones. Where one laughs at the poems of Virgil, Homer, Ariosto, Du Bartas etc.[.] twenty will laugh at those of John Cockburn or Mr. Zacharie Boyd”.⁷ John Pinkerton was even less sympathetic when he complained that Boyd’s reputation as a “benefactor of learning has been obscured by that cloud of miserable rhymes”.⁸ While one might excuse the strained quality of Boyd’s poetry on the grounds that he was unwilling to tamper with the biblical text, one cannot overlook that this “plain style” does not work, and degenerates into what his critics not inaccurately called “rhymed doggerel”.

It must be pointed out, however, that Boyd’s verse was not uniformly bad, and that, in fact, his best poetic efforts were never published during his lifetime. This the nineteenth-century bibliophile Gabriel Neil recognised when he published a selection of the biblical dramas comprising *Zion’s Flowers*, in which Boyd does not feel nearly so constrained by the biblical text. In *The Historie of Jonah*, for example, he expands the original forty-eight lines of scripture to cover over two thousand lines of verse. In this expansion, Boyd pays particular attention to elements of the original story that possess potential for dramatic embellishment.

That Boyd demonstrates a flair for dramatic presentation should come as no surprise to anyone familiar with his long devotional work, *The Last Battell of the Soule in Death* (1628), which is one of the few works of Scottish prose that falls within the important tradition of the *ars moriendi*. It is, moreover, the only significant example of Boyd’s prose work published during his lifetime. *The Last Battell* reveals that Boyd was not really a poet but a writer of prose, and that he must be considered one of the most accomplished seventeenth-century Scots writers of English. That Neil chose to publish this long devotional tract in the mid-nineteenth century suggests that at least one person recognised where Boyd’s real talents lay, and underlines how the failure to publish Boyd’s prose contributed in large measure to the reputation he has retained.

The Last Battell reveals how Boyd was clearly aware of larger literary and religious developments. The work is not simply a matter of Boyd writing a work about preparing to die; rather it shows him consciously incorporating elements of a tradition long established in European Christianity, which developed in response to the human need to make death acceptable and comprehensible. The most significant feature of *The Last Battell* is that, if Boyd had

⁷ S. Colvil, *Mock Poem or, Whigs Supplication* (London, 1681), sig. A7^r.

⁸ Quoted in Appendix to *Zion’s Flowers: or, Christian Poems for Spiritual Edification*, ed. G. Neil (Glasgow, 1855), p. xxiii.

written no other work, it would be sufficient to distinguish him among Scottish writers and give him a place as a contributor to the devotional life of the Scottish church. One additional item of interest is that the work was no mere academic exercise in imitation. It is the direct result of Boyd's own skirmish with death in September, 1626, to which he refers in the preface to the reader.

The *ars moriendi*, from which *The Last Battell* draws, begins with two anonymous medieval treatises, the *Tractatus artis bene moriendi*, written between 1414 and 1418, which was translated into nearly every European language over the next thirty years, and a shorter work, the *Ars Moriendi*, which is derived from the *Tractatus*, and usually remembered for its eleven woodcuts, which iconographically portray the internal struggle between good and evil for the soul of the dying man, as he is alternately besieged by demons and comforted by the good angels of inspiration. The drama of the deathbed captured in these early works lies behind Boyd's decision to write his work in dialogue form, as the minister's entreaties and the dying man's lamentations produce the same dramatic vividness of the medieval blockbook.

The Last Battell is, however, far more than a dramatic portraiture of death; it is both a work of devotion and a work of practical theology.⁹ On the first few pages of the tract, the dying man seems about to take his last gasp, but somehow he revives to persevere through an additional thousand pages to ask all manner of detailed theological questions. At the same time, Boyd uses several simple techniques to maintain dramatic sense; for example, he divides the work into days, suggesting that the dying man can tolerate only so much moralising before fatigue overcomes him. It is tempting to suggest that such divisions are intended for the reader as much as for the dying man; despite the literary and theological accomplishment of *The Last Battell*, no one can deny its excessive length. There is the danger that the work could easily degenerate into a dry and ineffective theological tract. This, however, does not happen, as Boyd keeps squarely in mind that the relationship between theology and devotion goes beyond the complexities of theological exegesis. Put another way, theology must have a direct application to the individual's religious life.

As well as a revealing work of Calvinist devotion, *The Last Battell* documents the pervasive attitude towards death exhibited during the seventeenth century. French social historian, Philippe Aries, observes how the seventeenth century saw a decided shift away from the macabre preoccupations of the Middle Ages, which

⁹ For a more extensive discussion of the literary and theological qualities of *The Last Battell*, see D. W. Atkinson, "Zachary Boyd and the *Ars Moriendi* Tradition", *Scottish Literary Journal*, 4, no. 1 (1977), 5-16.

carried on well into the sixteenth century, for a more hopeful attitude towards death.¹⁰ In *The Last Battell*, the traditional themes of the *Ubi Sunt?* and the *memento mori* continued as vital ingredients of the seventeenth-century attitude towards death, but are considerably softened, as is the threat of eternal damnation that loomed large in medieval homiletics. The pastor of *The Last Battell* remarks that “so soone as we beginne to liue, we also beginne to die”,¹¹ but also stresses the foolishness of painting death “with bare bones, with a skul, grining with its teeth, and with its sting, like a flooked Dart, for to pierce thorow the heart of man”.¹² What Boyd says is entirely in keeping with the times. The horrific is inconsistent with the Christian message of hope, as death is at once a sleep of the body and an escape of the soul into the eternal presence of God. Preoccupation with the grave is not in keeping with the need to look beyond the grave to the eternal life with God. Consistent with this more positive attitude, Boyd stresses meditation on the heavenly Jerusalem as much more valuable in motivating the wayfaring Christian than the *contemplatio mortis*, for, not only does it assist one to maintain one’s Christian commitment in the face of life’s daily trials, it also provides solace in a life that at times provides little comfort.

While *The Last Battell* is important as a work providing insight into the general religious milieu of the seventeenth century, it also suggests something of Boyd’s political views that, in turn, reflect the larger political situation of Scotland. Boyd was a supporter of the monarchy, and, despite it being commonplace to dedicate one’s works to important and influential persons, it is noteworthy that the first volume of *The Last Battell* is dedicated in English to Charles I and in French to his consort Henrietta Maria, and the second volume is dedicated to Elizabeth, the Electress Palatine, daughter of James VI, as a “Balme of Comfort” on the occasion of her husband’s death. Along similar lines, Boyd wrote a Latin oration in 1633 to welcome Charles to Holyrood, which, together with other similar works, was published as a tribute to the king. Given Boyd’s affiliation with Glasgow University, which was well established as a centre of royalist support, his sentiments are not surprising. Nor, therefore, was his reluctance to support the National Covenant of 1638; in this regard Robert Baillie describes Boyd as one of “the greatest opposites in the West to the subscription of the Covenant”.¹³ One should not, however, place too much emphasis on Baillie’s assessment, for Boyd did come

¹⁰ P. Aries, *The Hour of Our Death*, trans. H. Weaver (New York, 1981).

¹¹ Z. Boyd, *The Last Battell of the Soule in Death* (Edinburgh, 1629), 25.

¹² *Ibid.*, 14.

¹³ J. M. Long, *Glasgow and the Barony thereof — a review of three hundred years* (Glasgow, 1895), 51.

round to agreeing with the Covenant, writing a short time later of God's "wonderfull workes in the wonderfull harmonie of the Nationall Assemblie".¹⁴

On other matters, Boyd is much clearer. For example, he says of the Five Articles of Perth and the Scottish Prayer Book, "Lord, thou knowest how the prelats were thrust in vpon the Church by violence against the nationall covenant . . . first with five miserable articles of faith, and after with a service booke containing an English masse".¹⁵ Boyd was no equivocator, and he rejected any compromise with the English prelacy; to this end, he condemned those who "lye indifferent between"¹⁶ and remarks that "though man touch them not, the Lord hath a mouth and a foot of iudgement to spewe them out".¹⁷ Boyd also speaks out concerning Charles' military efforts against the Scots, although he tends to exaggerate the Scottish losses. He writes, "Lord, thou knowest . . . how wee were compassed by sea and land, and how our enemies in the strong holds did make the bowels of many poore ones gush out at their sides".¹⁸ And of course, he sees Scotland's victory as God's victory. "By deliuering vs from the hands of our enemies", he says, "from the bondage of a service booke made like a fairied whore for to allure the land to returne vnto Egypt, that Babel of Rome with whom the kings of the earth haue committed fornication, the Lord by his blessings wonderfull, both spiritually and temporall of all sortes, hath made vs merry."¹⁹ Despite such overt criticism of the English prelacy, however, Boyd stops short of criticising the king himself. Like a number of others, he expressed regret at how the king was listening to bad advice. To this end he writes:

"There be diuers sortes of men in this land. Some abhorre our covenant as a treasonable league, which is most fals and vntrue, and shall be seene so. When matters hid in darknesse shall be more clearly brought to light, when these men of sinne shall be made yet more manifest, wee hope that our gracious and dread soueraigne, abused by their plots, shall discern his worthy and religious nobles and other faithfull professours from these merchands of Rome, with all their adherents."²⁰

Boyd's royalist sentiments can be explained in the larger context of events in both England and Scotland. It is often argued that Cromwell and the English independents were as much a threat to presbyterian discipline and government as were Charles' Anglican prelates.

¹⁴ Z. Boyd, "The Trivmph of the Chvrch", in *Selected Sermons*, 171.

¹⁵ Z. Boyd, "The Refvge of the Chvrch," in *Selected Sermons*, 124.

¹⁶ "The Trivmph of the Chvrch", 169.

¹⁷ "The Refvge of the Chvrch", 124.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 170.

¹⁹ Z. Boyd, "Scotlands Hallelviah", in *Selected Sermons*, 127-28.

²⁰ "The Trivmph of the Chvrch", 169.

But, given Charles' promise for a presbyterian church government, the Scots aligned themselves with the king and unfortunately with the losing side. Thus Boyd's antipathy to Cromwell and his puritans could well explain his royalist support, although one should note one story suggesting that Boyd's relationship with Cromwell was not all negative. When the magistrates and ministers fled Glasgow, Boyd is said to have remained, preaching to Cromwell and his officers in the cathedral church in Glasgow. We are told that Boyd "railed on them all to their very face". Although Cromwell's men suggested he "pistol the scoundrel",²¹ Cromwell did the very reverse, inviting Boyd for dinner and an evening of godly conversation and prayer. The two must have had something in common, as Boyd did not leave until the small hours of the morning.

What must be stressed is that Boyd is not really comfortable with overt political discussion, and that when he talks about the need to purify the church, he is not so much concerned with the Prayer Book, or even the General Covenant, as he is with the moral and spiritual revival of those who comprise the church. He sees Scotland's problems, not as ones imposed from without, but as those it has brought upon itself. For Boyd, the National Covenant signalled the Church of Scotland as the specially called church of God; at the same time, the Scottish church was also the Israel which had forgotten God. Boyd therefore exhorts his listeners, "O brethren, the Lord is a mightie warriour. Behold how he meets with Jerusalem: he shoots threatening after threatening to the end that they would yeelde by breaking off their sinnes by repentance".²² Drawing the analogy between the Scottish church and Christ driving the moneylenders from the temple, Boyd also warns, "obserue heere in what estate the house of God was when Christ came: it was become a house of merchandise, yea and a denne of theeues; and therefore it was high time for Christ to come with his scourge".²³ "Let vs in the reformed Church", Boyd continues, "learne to beware of such merchandise, for if once we beginne to buy and sell in Gods house which should be a house of prayer, we shall not faile to feele that scourge of God vpon vs."²⁴ For Boyd, moreover, the temple is as much each individual as it is an institution, and to cleanse the church requires that each individual be cleansed; he warns, "*Knowe yee not . . . that yee are the temple of God? If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroye.*"²⁵

Despite his warnings about the wrath of God to come, Boyd

²¹ J. Pagan, *Sketch of the History of Glasgow* (Glasgow, 1847), 44.

²² Z. Boyd, "Zions Teares", in *Selected Sermons*, 101.

²³ Z. Boyd, "The Cleansing of the Temple", in *Selected Sermons*, 72.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 73.

recognises that in the preacher's arsenal hope is a much more valuable instrument than fear. While he does not doubt God's anger, Boyd also knows that divine anger is mitigated by mercy. Therefore, Boyd presents God, not as punishing people, but as calling them to correct themselves. "Let Gods children heere learn", Boyd preaches, "that the correction of God is a great blessing, a thing to be sought for as a preservative from sinne, a subdueing of our pride and sinnefull vanities, a hedging vp of our waye with thornes that we breake not out".²⁶ Therefore he says, "learne heere for preventing and for subdueing of sinnes to cry to God for correction, as men cry for a surgeon for to prevent a fever. Better it is go with one eye, one foot, one hand to heauen, then with two to hell".²⁷

Boyd's accomplishment lies, then, in providing insight into the devotional life of the seventeenth-century Scottish church. Boyd was not a statesman or a theologian; he was a minister of the church. What is more, he clearly knew where he could make his greatest contribution; as he wrote to his cousin Robert Boyd, "You know as well as I that I have not aspired after high things and choose rather to content myself with those that are lower".²⁸ For Boyd, these "lower" things are the most important. As a preacher, Boyd was called by God to call the elect to God's true church. The preacher possesses, Boyd observes, a "warrant from God" to "winne some poore soule to the loue of Jesus".²⁹ This is no easy job, as Boyd himself suggests, "they who would doe this worke as they should must with earnest prayers, painefull reading, and serious meditation emptie their veines of blood till palenesse . . . bee printed vpon their faces".³⁰

More than this, Boyd stresses that the preacher is a vehicle of God. Thus he is at great pains to warn any would-be preacher about the dangers of human vanity. As he advises:

"Heares thou a man make an excellent sermon whereby all the powers of thy soule are shaken, so that thou is forced to quite thy sinne? Saye not, O the preacher! O the wonderfull man! Loue the man the meanes of thy mercy. But saye not, O the man! But saye rather, God is mighty in the man. Look ouer the man & gaze vpon God; fixe thy eyes vpon him & wonder at his word."³¹

There is no worldly glory to be had from preaching, and Boyd therefore talks of himself as one of "Gods interpreters", who "have neede to begge the spirit of God that we maye teach you the true

²⁶ Z. Boyd, "The Refvge of the Chvrch", in *Selected Sermons*, 114.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 115.

²⁸ Wodrow, *Collections*, 130.

²⁹ Z. Boyd, *The Balme of Gilead* (Edinburgh, 1629), sig. 2^r.

³⁰ Z. Boyd, *The Garden of Zion* (Glasgow, 1644), sig. 2^r.

³¹ Z. Boyd, "An Exposition of the Epistle of S. Paul", in *Selected Sermons*, 10-11.

meaning of the wordes of God”.³² Concomitant with this is Boyd’s rejection of “humane learning” as sufficient to interpreting scripture and communicating its meaning to others. “If a man had all the philosophie of Aristotle in his head,” Boyd writes, “if he have not the spirit of God in his heart, he will neuer vnderstand the right sense of scriptures”.³³ Here, however, a cautionary note must be sounded. Boyd is not rejecting “humane learning” outright; rather he is claiming that scripture must take precedence over everything else.

Boyd also understands that God’s presence must be as much within the listener as within the preacher. Just as the preacher depends on the holy spirit for understanding of scripture, so must the listener if he wishes to comprehend what the preacher provides; as Boyd remarks, “no more shall yee of the people be able to vnderstand their [the preachers’] interpretation without the same spirit”.³⁴ Finally, there is underpinning what Boyd writes about both preacher and listener the Calvinist principle that the ability to understand God’s word is a consequence of being one of God’s elect. Without the presence of the holy spirit, the individual can never hear God’s message.

Boyd was trained in theology at Saumur, and although he would not consider himself a practising theologian, his sermons do demonstrate a clear Calvinist leaning, which is only natural considering the dominant rôle of Calvinist teaching in the Scottish church since the Confession of Faith. While Boyd stays away from polemical outburst, he in at least one sermon makes very clear his views about Catholics and the Catholic notion of justification by works:

“Papists are foolish in their workes. Though all their workes were good & ordeined by God, they haue one worke, a barbarous worke with a barbarous name called *opus operatum*, the worke wrought, which, like a dead flie, maketh all their perfume to stincke. The most part of all their workes haue no ordinance from God. When they haue done them all, God maye saye of the most part, who hath required such things at your hands.”³⁵

In his sermons, Boyd repeatedly brings attention to how individual salvation lies exclusively in God’s hands, that men exist “dead in their sinnes”, and that “no man is saued by his owne handiworke”.³⁶ Rather one must be exclusively dependent on Christ “who spiritually and temporally giueth eyes to the blind and eares to the deafe, a tongue

³² *Ibid.*, 11.

³³ *Ibid.*, 12.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 13.

³⁵ Z. Boyd, “The Christian His Pilgrimage”, in *Selected Sermons*, 50.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 36.

to the dumb, and legges to the lame”.³⁷ Consistent with Calvinist teaching, Boyd recognises the importance of “the staffe of faith . . . wherewith we may leape ouer the ditches of all difficulties”.³⁸

It would be wrong to assume that Boyd got no further in his theological understanding than the fundamental principles of Calvin’s *Institutes*. As any number of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century religious writers recognised,³⁹ it is impossible, despite the rigour of Calvin’s logic, to remove freewill entirely from the process of redemption. This was especially so for those, like Boyd, who were concerned with saving souls rather than theological exegesis. While Boyd recognised that doctrine defines humankind’s relationship with God, he also knew that it must take second place to devotional concerns when the individual Christian wishes to know what he must do to be saved. This is nowhere better demonstrated than in *The Last Battell*, where the doctrines of predestination and election loom large, yet the contingency of salvation on individual action remains a necessary component of devotional life.

The fourth day’s conference between the pastor and the dying man in *The Last Battell* constitutes one of Boyd’s most obvious statements of Calvinist predeterminism. The dying man asks the question crucial to any Calvinist, “let me be so bold as to intreate you to declare brieflie how a man by the workinges of the *Spirit within*, whether he be a Reprobate or one of Gods chosen Ones”.⁴⁰ The pastor then supplies a lengthy discussion of the distinction between the elect and reprobate, and how one must look within oneself to find the “signs” of one’s election. Beyond this, however, the minister recognises that the dying man must have reasons to act, as must any Christian; and therefore much of *The Last Battell* stresses the need for timely preparaton for death:

“It is good that man with a watchful eye holde in perpetuall jealousie the cunning slightes and windings of the deceit of sinne in youth: And therefore, while it is youth time, while God calleth . . . while the Shippe is sound, let vs sette foorth in time to saile toward the port of Saluation, & the harberie of *Grace in Glorie*.”⁴¹

Boyd’s logic is straightforward enough: if one must prepare before it is too late, then it is reasonable to assume that such preparation

³⁷ Z. Boyd, “Christ Ovr Righteovsnesse”, in *Selected Sermons*, 20.

³⁸ Z. Boyd, “The Christian His Pilgrimage”, 57.

³⁹ See D. W. Atkinson, “Devotional Responses to Doctrinal Dilemmas: Piety in the English Reformed Church”, *Historical Magazine of the Protestant Episcopal Church*, ii (June, 1983), 167-79.

⁴⁰ Z. Boyd, *The Last Battell of the Soule in Death*, 21.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 51.

affects one's future spiritual life. Thus one is faced with the paradox that, while the elect cannot fall from grace, they cannot be saved without righteous action. Aware of the paradox, Boyd adheres to the Calvinist notion that the will to believe and the desire for holiness are themselves visible signs of grace:

“He that desireth grace is not altogether graceless. It is Gods goodnesse that hath giuen you this small and weake desire of grace, in this Gods good hand is vpon you: Hee who giueth grace to desire grace, shall giue also grace for grace.”⁴²

For Boyd, as indeed for many Calvinists, the issue is not one of rejecting predestination and justification by faith, but of how much one wishes to stress the theological implications of Calvinist teaching. Although Boyd stresses the importance of justification by faith, it is not at the expense of human effort in the process of redemption; therefore he exhorts us to “strīue to get faith and to increase our faith by hearing, readeing, prayeing, and meditateing, night and day in that word, which is *the powre of God to saluation*”.⁴³ It is not the case that Boyd rejects the workings of the law; rather they become a means by which the elect are awakened to sin; as he says, “the cheefe end of the law intended by God is to drive sinners vnto Christ for a surety to pay all that which the law required”.⁴⁴ The elect are by no means immune to sin, and sanctification therefore is a process by which the individual repeatedly breaks the law, feels remorse for his actions, and repents for his transgressions. Boyd could hardly be clearer than when he writes, “the Christians pilgrimage is from sinne to grace and from grace to grace till at last he come to glory. . . . As from grace to grace there is a way, so there is also a waye from grace to glory, yea & from glory to glory”.⁴⁵ While Boyd observes, “I will not enterprise heere to handle the controversie of mans free will, which papists acknowledge to be greatly weakened by the fall of Adam”, he accepts that “there remaineth such a power in man that he, beeing assisted and helped by grace, may properly fulfill the law of God”.⁴⁶ What this means is explicit: it is to “doe all that God commandeth him to doe, and so make him self *a new heart and a new spirit*”.⁴⁷

Regardless of the theological implications of predestination, Boyd is not ready to divest the individual from having responsibility

⁴² *Ibid.*, 193.

⁴³ Z. Boyd, “Christ Ovr Righteousnesse”, 33.

⁴⁴ Glasgow University Library, MS Gen. 383: Z. Boyd, *A Compend of the Bible*, 762.

⁴⁵ “The Christian His Pilgrimage”, 53.

⁴⁶ Z. Boyd, “Mercy for Zion”, in *Selected Sermons*, 82.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

in the process of spiritual growth. This he recognises as another powerful instrument crucial to devotional life, even though it is incongruous with the theological underpinnings of the Scottish church. As a preacher providing instruction on how one must live a Christian life, Boyd demonstrates a feature typical of homiletic writing in staying away from contentious doctrinal and liturgical issues. While in his sermons Boyd might couch his discussion in a theological context, the theology itself never becomes obtrusive; at best, it is a means to an end. Furthermore, Boyd demonstrates fundamental features of Protestant moral instruction that distinguishes it from its Catholic counterpart. Catholic casuists accepted that conscience needed considerable assistance, and thus their works are filled with highly detailed instruction drawing on sacramental and canon law. By contrast, Protestant casuists accepted that no moral code could be defined in a way that allowed for every contingency, and that the best that could be supplied were those basic Christian fundamentals that the awakened spirit would recognise and act upon. This understanding of Christian instruction offers another explanation for Boyd's emphasis on the spiritual and moral rejuvenation of the individual believer rather than on external matters pertaining to liturgy and sacrament.

Consistent with this distinctive Protestant approach to devotional instruction, Boyd is very straightforward in his definition of sin: it is to put oneself before God. It is that which separates God from the individual; it is to take the temporal pleasure before what is eternal; it is, very simply, ignorance of God. More pressing for Boyd than definition, however, is the consequence of sin. Sin, he says, is "like a pill of aloes couered with sugar, sweete with out but bitter within, sweete in the mouth but bitter in the belly like gall or wormewood. All the painted pleasures of sinne are but like tombes hauing no thing within but rottenesse and stinke".⁴⁸ But Boyd also stresses what life with God means; it is to experience a sense of completeness out of which comes joy. He writes, "let vs take delight . . . The birds, as soone as day beginne to breake and that they see the light, they beginne to sing and reioice in that life. So let our soules sing and reioice when wee haue any good occasion of this light".⁴⁹

There is no questioning that Boyd was a popular preacher. He could not have stayed so long in the Barony parish if this had not been the case. But his concern with spreading the Christian message is obvious in other ways as well. Few writers so ably express the plain style that grew in popularity among preachers of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries; in other words, what failed in Boyd's

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 96.

⁴⁹ Z. Boyd, "The Worlds Condemnation", in *Selected Sermons*, 193.

poetry succeeded in his prose. Writing in the plain style was, for Boyd, a religious duty, consistent with being true to scripture; as Boyd observed, “if I build upon Christ, the fundamental Stone, the *Pearles and precious stones* of Christs passions, I shall get a reward; but I build vpon him *Stubble, Hay, or Wood* . . . of humane words, of worldlie eloquence, I shall bee saued verie hardlie, only by the fire of great affliction. For this cause, knowing the great danger, I wish that all my comforts to you and all others bee onlie of Christ, who is both our Suretie and Sauour”.⁵⁰

One can discuss Boyd’s use of the plain style in the larger context of the seventeenth-century reaction to the complexities of Arcadian wit and Ciceronian rhetoric. But beyond this, there was the more fundamental issue of Protestant hermeneutics, which rejected the fourfold method of scriptural exegesis for a simple literal interpretation uncorrupted by the human intellect and imagination. One must not assume that Boyd’s plain style is any less accomplished because it lacks complexity and stylistic excess. Rather the sincerity of Boyd’s prose, which is really only appreciated when spoken out loud, underlines why he remained a preacher in the same parish for so long. It is true that Boyd’s prose is uneven, as one might expect of a preacher who produced a new and different sermon each week. But this must be balanced off against the fact that Boyd was not writing with an eye to what the literary critic might think.

When one looks to establish Boyd’s place in the later Scottish Reformation, one should not look for a figure that dominates either the political or religious landscape. Rather one should appreciate that history is the life of the ordinary person, and that Boyd, in reflecting the concerns of the ordinary person, deserves recognition for giving us the opportunity to see the religious life of the Scottish church that underpinned and sustained the dominant events of the day. He allows us to see what religious life meant, not in the terms of the theologian or the high church official, but in terms of the minister of the church, who worked tirelessly for the souls committed to his care.

⁵⁰ *The Last Battell of the Soule in Death*, 21.